Article by Alexander Graham Bell, March 31, 1910

56

3-2-79 1910, March 31, Beinn Bhreagh Recorder RADIUM AND CANCER By Alexander Graham Bell

March 31 :— In the summer of 1903 Dr. Z. F. Sowers of Washington, D. C. was staying at Beinn Bhreagh in attendance upon Mrs. Grosvenor at the time Gertrude was born (July 28, 1903).

He told me of the remarkable results obtained in the treatment of external cancers by the application of the X-rays of Roentgen, and regretted that the rays could not be applied to deep-seated cancers. I then directed his attention to the fact that the X-rays were also emitted by Radium, and that it might be possible to bring the rays to bear on the diseased substance of a deep-seated cancer by enclosing a fragment of radium in a sealed glass tube and inserting it into the heart of the cancer.

Dr. Sowers said that this was an important suggestion and thought it should be published for the benefit of the medical profession.

I therefore wrote a letter to him explaining the idea, to which he replied. He then sent the two letters, if I remember rightly, to a medical journal and I believe the letters were published there, although I have not seen the publication. At all events they were published somewhere and seemed to have attracted considerable attention at the time.

57

The following article upon the subject appeared in the Scientific American, September 12, 1903 page 191: AGB

Article from Scientific American Sept. 12, 1903, p 191

Dr. Alexander Graham Bell has in a letter to Dr. Sowers, a physician of Washington, made a suggestion which may lead to good results.

He said in the letter: “I understand from you that the Roentgen X-rays, and the rays emitted by Radium, have been found to have a marked curative effect upon external cancers, but that the effects upon deep-seated cancers have not thus far proved satisfactory.

It has occurred to me that one reason for the unsatisfactory nature of these latter experiments arises from the fact that the rays have been applied externally, thus having to pass through healthy tissues of various depths in order to reach the cancerous matter.

The Crookes' tube from which the Roentgen rays are emitted is, of course, too bulky to be inserted into the middle of a mass of cancer; but there is no reason why a tiny fragment of Radium sealed up in a fine glass tube should not be inserted into the very heart of the cancer, thus acting directly upon the diseased material. Would it not be worth while making experiments along this line?”

To this letter Dr. Sowers replied: “The suggestion which you make in regard to the application of the Radium rays to the substance of deep-seated cancer I regard as very valuable. If such experiments should be made, I have no doubt they would prove successful in many cases where we now have failures.”